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## **SPECIFICATION**

TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

WE, Paul Dathe, a resident of Plymouth, Minnesota, and Dion L. Kells, a resident of Norwood, Minnesota, and both Citizens of the United States of America, has invented certain new and useful improvements in a

### **FOOD DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM**

of which the following is a specification.

## FOOD DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

### BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

#### Field of the Invention

[001] The present invention relates generally apparatus and methods for dispensing food products, eating utensils, and seasoning or topping packets.

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#### Description of the Related Art

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[002] In recent years, people have become more health conscious and more concerned about what foods they consume. At the same time, people continue to be more active and have less time to obtain and prepare healthy food choices for themselves and for their children. Thus, there tends to be a conflict between convenience and healthy food choices. For example, typical "fast food" outlets can provide fast, inexpensive and complete meals for a person or for a family; however, the food offered tends to be high in fat and extremely high in calories.

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[003] The same considerations are true for snacks or small meals. Consumers on the run will often grab a snack while at a point of sale (e.g., a cash register in a grocery store or any type of business) as a matter of convenience. Likewise parents may choose to purchase a snack or their children may request or demand such a snack when presented with the choices at the point of sale. The food choices commonly available at a point of sale are generally limited. Often, there is a wide selection of candy, chips, gum and more recently soda that is chilled in a cooler conveniently located near the point of sale.

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5           **[004]**           The choice of products placed at the point of sale are based on a number of factors. The first is convenience. Candy and the like can be stored in bulk at room temperature, can be readily stocked and displayed, and can be quickly identified by the consumer. The second factor is inducement. That is, retailers will place items at the point of sale that are likely to trigger impulse  
10           purchases. For example, children will see candy and ask for it from their parents. People purchasing other products will see tempting food choices and partake. Another factor is serving the perceived convenience of the consumer. That is, providing last minute items people may typically want or need but often forget (e.g., batteries). Finally, people who are hungry and looking for a snack will  
15           choose from what is presented. That is, whatever is conveniently presented to them at the point of sale becomes their menu from which to choose.

**[005]**           Another factor, related to convenience is the readiness of the food choice for consumption. As our society demands greater convenience and becomes increasingly mobile, there has been an upsurge in the number and types  
20           of food packages that customers can consume “on the go” or when it is otherwise inconvenient for a consumer to sit down and ingest a meal in what society may view as a conventional setting (i.e., sitting down around a table).

**[006]**           Candy, chips, and similar items are sold in individual, single serve packages. The consumer can obtain them and they are instantly ready to be  
25           consumed. Retailers will choose to present items at the point of sale based on what they perceive the consumers to ultimately want based on past sales success, while meeting the other factors noted above.

5           **[007]**           With the above taken into consideration, various manufacturers of food products strive to present food choices that are desirable to consumers and meet the various factors for convenience. Such food choices include pudding, applesauce, JELL-O ®, yogurt, ice cream, soup, and other food products. For example, pudding, applesauce, JELL-O ®, ice cream, soup, and yogurt are  
10 already available in convenient, single serve containers that can be purchased individually. Historically, these products have not been offered at the point of sale or extensively touted as a convenience snack or meal. This is because some food products (e.g., ice cream, JELL-O ®, yogurt) need refrigeration for preservation until sold. Also, in most cases, the aforementioned food products  
15 require an eating utensil (e.g., a spoon, fork, spork) in order to be consumed.

**[008]**           With the recent popularity of providing soda and other chilled liquid items at the point of sale, the refrigeration issue becomes moot. That is, convenient and properly sized refrigeration units are readily available and are already in use in many places. Thus, the remaining consideration is eating utensil  
20 delivery. Obviously, to truly be a food of convenience, eating utensils must be provided to the consumer with the purchase of the product.

**[009]**           One regional brand of yogurt, COLOMBO ®, has provided a spoon that is incorporated into the top of a single serve yogurt container. While this is certainly convenient from the standpoint of providing the spoon to the  
25 consumer, this concept suffers in other ways. That is, in order to be so packaged the spoon must necessarily be very small. This makes it difficult to manipulate the spoon; both for assembly and for product consumption. Once assembled,

5 consumers may have a difficult time keeping the spoon together. Furthermore,  
the small spoon requires that only small quantities of yogurt be delivered to the  
mouth. With the spoon being so small, it is also difficult to reach the bottom of  
the container. Finally, this particular brand of yogurt is not available in all areas  
and even when available consumers are limited to only that brand and particular  
10 product line if they wish to receive the incorporated spoon.

[010] Another possible solution would be to place a container of standard  
one-piece plastic spoons near the display of food products. Such spoons could be  
individually wrapped or unwrapped. In either case, there are several drawbacks.  
The cost for such spoons is increased because they are full size. It becomes  
15 harder to fill the container because the spoons tend to bridge. Finally, people will  
likely take the spoons for other reasons (e.g., employees taking a break) or other  
uses. That is, full size spoons are desirable for many reasons and will be taken  
accordingly. Thus, it becomes even more difficult to maintain a full container.

[011] Thus, there exists a need to provide a mechanism for providing  
20 yogurt, pudding, applesauce, JELL-O ®, ice cream, soup, and the like as a  
convenience food item. There further exists a need to provide a mechanism for  
dispensing eating utensils for use to consume the food products. There also exists  
a need to provide a simple, convenient mechanism for dispensing 3-D eating  
utensils.

## 25 BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[012] The present invention includes, in one embodiment, the placement  
of a refrigerated unit at or near the point of sale in a business setting, such as a

5 grocery store. Individual containers containing a food product (e.g., a comestible  
container) are stocked and displayed within a refrigerated unit. In one  
embodiment, the comestible container may contain food products such as ice  
cream, yogurt, JELL-O®, pudding, soup, etc. Thus, consumers at a point of sale  
see and are tempted by a food choice that is alternative to the candy and pop  
10 traditionally offered at the point of sale. Furthermore, those consumers seeking  
out such alternatives are aided in a convenient manner. The consumer can simply  
select one or more comestible containers for consumption.

[013] In one embodiment, eating utensils, such as spoons, forks, sporks,  
knives, chopsticks, and/or straws, are dispensed from a dispenser that is attached  
15 to a price facing of the shelf displaying the food product. This arrangement can  
be used when the food product is displayed at the point of sale or when displayed  
in the more traditional locations, for example, yogurt or ice cream in a dairy case.  
The dispenser fits below the shelf so as to minimize its intrusiveness and reduce  
the amount of space taken from stocking the food item. An attachment  
20 mechanism is provided so that the dispenser attaches to points along the price  
facing. This prevents the dispenser from obscuring food item products and from  
significantly obscuring the displayed pricing information.

[014] The dispenser is loaded with a bandolier of eating utensils such as  
spoons, forks, sporks, knives, chop sticks, and/or straws. The bandolier has a  
25 plurality of individually sealed eating utensils that are provided in plastic satchels  
that are interconnected. A perforation or other point of separation is provided so  
that the eating utensils can be easily separated. The bandolier is loaded and the

5 first eating utensil is guided through an opening in the dispenser. In one embodiment, a tab is provided that separates one satchel from the next as the consumer pulls the lead eating utensil.

[015] In one embodiment, the eating utensils, such as spoons, forks, sporks, knives, chop sticks or straws, dispensed by the dispenser are full size eating utensils. In another embodiment, the eating utensils dispensed by the  
10 dispenser are reduced size eating utensils.

[016] In another embodiment, the eating utensils, such as spoons, forks, or sporks, have two sections that are hinged together. Thus, for storage within the satchel of the bandolier, the spoon, fork or spork is folded in half to minimize  
15 space. When in use, the spoon, fork or spork is unfolded to its maximum length. A hinge tab snaps into a hinge slot securing the spoon, fork or spork in the open position. The arrangement of the tab and slot is such that as pressure is applied to the spoon, fork or spork during use (e.g., scooping yogurt) the tab and slot are further engaged. That is, to disengage the tab and slot, force must be applied in a  
20 direction opposite to that provided during normal use of the spoon, fork or spork.

[017] The present invention, in one embodiment, is a method of providing a refrigerated or frozen food item (e.g., ice cream, yogurt, etc.). The method includes providing a refrigerated unit proximate a point of sale and providing individual containers of refrigerated or frozen food within the  
25 refrigerated unit.

[018] In another embodiment, the present invention is a method of providing a food product (e.g., yogurt, ice cream, soup, applesauce, etc.) on the

5 go. The method includes providing a refrigerated display case proximate a point of sale, the display having at least one shelf and stocking a food product within the refrigerated display. The method also includes providing a dispenser coupled to the at least one shelf, wherein the dispenser includes a cavity and an opening and providing a bandolier of individually wrapped foldable eating utensils (e.g.,  
10 spoons, forks, sproks). The method further includes storing the bandolier within the cavity so that a first end of the bandolier is fed through the opening so that the eating utensil can be dispensed.

[019] In another embodiment, the present invention is a eating utensil dispenser. The eating utensil dispenser includes a housing, a cavity within the  
15 housing for receiving a bandolier of individually wrapped items, an opening through the housing in communication with the cavity, and an attachment bracket for coupling the housing to a price shelf of a shelving unit.

[020] In another embodiment, the present invention is a system for providing food items on the go. The system includes a dispenser having a  
20 housing with an internal cavity and an opening in communication the internal cavity and an attachment bracket coupleable with the dispenser so that the dispenser may be supported from a price shelf of a food item display. The system also includes a bandolier of individually wrapped plastic eating utensils (e.g., spoons, forks, sproks, knives, chop sticks, straws), wherein the bandolier is  
25 receivable within the cavity so that a first end of the bandolier is guided through the opening.



5           **[021]**           In another embodiment, the present invention includes dispensing seasoning packets or packets with topping through a bandolier for use with a food product (e.g., yogurt, ice cream, soup, applesauce, etc.) on the go.

**[022]**           In another embodiment, the present invention includes a method for providing free samples. That is, a system of the present invention would  
10       include one or more bandoliers with utensils and/or seasoning or topping packets to be used with the food product (e.g., yogurt, ice cream, soup, applesauce, etc.) that customers may try prior to buying the food product.

**[023]**           While multiple embodiments are disclosed, still other embodiments of the present invention will become apparent to those skilled in the  
15       art from the following detailed description, which shows and describes illustrative embodiments of the invention. As will be realized, the invention is capable of modifications in various obvious aspects, all without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention. Accordingly, the drawings and detailed description are to be regarded as illustrative in nature and not restrictive.

20                               **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

**[024]**           FIG. 1 is a schematic illustration of a food display unit having a food item and an associated eating utensil dispenser provided in proximity to a point of sale.

**[025]**           FIG. 1a is a schematic illustration of a food display unit having a  
25       food item, an associated eating utensil dispenser, and an associated microwave oven provided in proximity to a point of sale.

5           [026]           FIG 2. is a perspective view of a food item shelf with an associated eating utensil dispenser.

          [027]           FIG. 3 is an illustration of a bandolier of eating utensils suitable for placement into the dispensers of FIGS. 1 or 2.

          [028]           FIG. 4 is a perspective view of the eating utensil dispenser of  
10       FIGS. 1 or 2 with a bandolier of eating utensils loaded therein and a number of eating utensil satchels expelled from an opening in the dispenser.

          [029]           FIG. 5 is a top planar view of a portion of a bandolier of eating utensils illustrating the interconnection of individual satchels.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION

15       [030]           FIG. 1 illustrates a food display unit 10 having a plurality of food items 16 (e.g., containers of yogurt, ice cream, pudding, soup, applesauce, JELLO<sup>®</sup>, salads, etc.) displayed on a shelf 18. A dispenser 12 is attached to a price facing 14 of the shelf 18 and is stocked with a bandolier 28 of plastic eating utensils 2 (e.g., spoons, forks, sporks, knives, chop sticks, straws). The food  
20       display unit 10 is proximate a point of sale, such as checkout lane 20. Checkout lane 20 includes a checkout counter 22 and a register 24.

          [031]           In one embodiment, the food display unit 10 is a refrigerator unit where the food items 16 displayed, such as yogurt, salads, and JELLO<sup>®</sup>, require refrigeration. In one embodiment, the food display unit 10 is a freezer unit where  
25       the food items 16 displayed, such as ice cream, sherbet, etc., need to be maintained in a frozen state. In one embodiment, the food display unit 10 includes a heating unit (such as a microwave, see Fig. 1a) where the food items 16

5 displayed, such as soup, stew, pizza, stir-fry, etc., may be heated. Alternatively,  
the food display unit 10 may have the heating unit integrated within the display to  
maintain the food items 16 in a heated state. This can be accomplished through  
heat lamps, electric heating plates, hot water baths, or other means known in the art  
for maintaining food in a heated state. In one embodiment, the food display unit  
10 is simply a set of display shelving without refrigeration or heating. This is  
used where the food items 16 displayed, such as pudding, applesauce, etc., do not  
require refrigeration or heating.

[032] In one embodiment, as depicted in FIG. 1a, the food display unit  
10 and a microwave oven 25 are provided proximate the point of sale, such as a  
15 checkout lane 20 with a checkout counter 22 and a register 24. In other  
embodiments, other suitable heating mechanisms (e.g., electric or gas fired ovens  
or stove tops, etc.) may be substituted for the microwave oven.

[033] The food display unit 10 is stocked with food items 16 that are  
microwaveable (e.g., soup, stew, pizza, burritos, etc.). A customer removes a  
20 microwaveable food item 16 from the food display unit 10 and places the food  
item 16 in the microwave oven 25 for heating.

[034] A dispenser 12 is attached to a price facing 14 of the shelf 18, the  
top or side of the food display unit 10, or the top or side of the microwave oven  
25. In one embodiment, the dispenser 12 is stocked with a bandolier 28 of plastic  
eating utensils 2 (e.g., spoons, forks, sporks, knives, chop sticks, straws). In  
another embodiment, the dispenser 12 may be stocked with season packets or  
packets containing toppings for use with a food product. In order to facilitate

5       having utensils and toppings/seasoning packets for use by a consumer, one or  
more dispensers 12 may be attached to the price facing 14 of the shelf 18. Thus,  
when the customer approaches the point of sale, he or she has immediate, easy  
access to everything needed for a hot or warm meal (i.e., the food item 16,  
seasoning packets, the means of heating the food item 25, and the eating utensil  
10       2).

[035]       By providing a food display unit 10 stocked with food items 16  
and eating utensils 32 proximate the point of sale, food items 16, such as yogurt,  
ice cream, soup, stews, stir-fry, applesauce, pudding, salads, etc., become foods of  
convenience. For example, in one embodiment, where the food item 16 is yogurt,  
15       this concept is referred to as "yogurt on the go". That is, yogurt becomes a choice  
for consumers looking for a fast, convenient, simple, ready-to-eat food product.  
Everything the consumer needs is placed in a convenient location; the yogurt  
product is chilled in an easily accessible, highly visible cooler and spoons 32 are  
conveniently provided right alongside the yogurt. There is no need to search for  
20       an eating utensil elsewhere. In one embodiment, the spoons are customized for  
use with the yogurt container, but are not limited to one type, style or brand of  
yogurt. That is, because the spoons are individually and separately distributed,  
any type or combination of yogurt products can be stocked in the food display  
unit 10, which in the context of yogurt would be a refrigeration unit.  
25       Furthermore, this convenience is provided without requiring a modification to the  
yogurt container. Also, a dispenser 12 with topping packets may be included to  
allow a customer to add toppings to the yogurt.

5           **[036]**           This arrangement satisfies the criteria for both the consumer and the seller, as discussed above. That is, with the combination of yogurt at the point of sale and the present spoon and spoon dispenser, yogurt becomes a food of convenience. This arrangement is easy to stock, may trigger impulse purchases, will satisfy those consumers simply seeking convenient foods, will cater towards those looking to make healthy choices, and allows parents to satisfy children's requests with a healthy food product.

10           **[037]**           These and other benefits will often also be realized when the dispenser and spoons are located near traditional yogurt selling points (e.g., the dairy case). Thus, for purposes of the present invention the use and placement of the yogurt display (e.g., stocked product), the dispenser 12, and the spoons can occur anywhere. However, as described an additional set of advantages is realized when the yogurt on the go concept is utilized proximate the point of sale.

15           **[038]**           The "yogurt on the go" concept has been provided as one example of making a food item and an eating utensil available in close proximity to a point of sale. Those skilled in the art will realize that the concept can be readily adapted to other food items (e.g., ice cream, soup, pudding, JELLO ®, applesauce, salads, stir-fry, etc.), other eating utensils (e.g., forks, sporks, knives, chop sticks), and other food display units 10 (e.g., freezer units, heating units, and simple food display shelves that are neither refrigerated nor heated). Thus, the invention should not be limited to the "yogurt on the go" concept.

20           **[039]**           As used herein, a food display unit 10 is proximate the point of sale when that food display unit 10 is visible from and can be accessed by a

5 consumer when that consumer is accessing, waiting to access, or approaching the point of sale. In many retail locations, there will be multiple checkout counters. Each such counter may be considered a point of sale and have its own merchandise displayed. The present invention also encompasses the concept wherein one or more food display units 10 are proximate one or more of these  
10 checkout counters, but may be disposed to benefit multiple checkout counters. For example, a food display unit 10 may be centered along a line of checkout lanes. Thus, the food display unit 10 will certainly be closer to some checkout lanes than to others, however it would still be considered proximate the point of sale.

15 [040] FIG. 2 illustrates the dispenser 12 as it is affixed to the price facing 14 either within the food display unit 10 or at any display shelf (e.g., a refrigerated shelf at the dairy case or a freezer shelf in a freezer). The dispenser 12 may be formed from plastic using any known manufacturing technique, such as injection molding the component parts. The dispenser 12 includes a hollow  
20 interior cavity for storing a bandolier 28 of eating utensils 32 (e.g., spoons, forks, sporks, knives, straws, chop sticks). Various guide mechanisms (not shown) may be located within the cavity for holding and guiding the bandolier 28 as it is stored and ultimately withdrawn.

[041] A dispenser opening 35 is provided that is in communication with  
25 the cavity. One end of the bandolier 28 is guided out of the cavity through the dispenser opening 35 so that individual eating utensil packets (or individual seasoning or topping packets) 30 can be accessed and removed. A tab or tearing

5 mechanism (not shown), such as a forked prong, may be provided that allows the user to index an eating utensil packet 30 and engage a portion of the bandolier 28 so that the bandolier 28 is caused to tear or separate allowing that eating utensil packet 30 to be taken.

[042] The dimensions of the dispenser 35 are selected to accommodate the bandolier. That is the interior height of the cavity must accommodate the height of the bandolier 28 positioned within. The width and length are similarly chosen to accommodate the linear dimensions of the full bandolier roll. Alternatively, the dispenser can be configured to receive a plurality of bandoliers 28 and will be sized accordingly.

15 [043] Another consideration for the configuration of the dispenser 35 is the minimization of the intrusion into the shelf space allotted for the food item 16. As such shelf space is valuable, it is desirable to limit or eliminate the need to stock less food items 16 because of the dispenser 35. As illustrated, the dispenser 35 tucks conveniently below a shelf 19, so that if the space between shelves 18 and 19 are configured as shown, no loss of product space results. That is, there is an existing gap between the stacked food items 16 and the shelf 19 that would have been unused but for the dispenser 36.

20 [044] Similarly, just as it is desirable to prevent the dispenser from taking space away from the product, it is desirable to minimize the effect the dispenser 35 will have in obscuring information presented on the price facing 14 (i.e., the front or exposed edge of shelf 19). The price facing 14 is commonly used to receive tags indicating the type and price of the product displayed above

5 or below the price facing 14. As illustrated, a pair of attachment brackets 26 are coupled with and support the dispenser 12. The attachment brackets 26 engage and are supported by the price facing 14. The attachment brackets are relatively narrow in comparison to the dispenser 12. Thus, only a relatively small space along the price facing 14 is taken. The front or exposed portions of the  
10 attachment brackets 26 and the dispenser 12 could receive advertisements or other printed matter. The attachment brackets 26 have a configuration that allows them to be snapped into opposed edges of the price facing 14 and held in place. Other attachment mechanisms such as adhesives, magnets, or mechanical fasteners (e.g., bolts, screws, clips, etc.) could be used to secure the attachment brackets 26 to the  
15 price facing 14.

[045] The arrangement of the dispenser 12 and the attachment brackets 26 is such that it may be retrofitted to existing shelving units 18, 19 in a quick and simple manner while minimizing any negative impact to that shelf space. Such a dispenser 12 could be configured to be a standard component of new shelving.  
20 Alternatively, other attachment mechanisms can be utilized to provide dispenser 12 in close proximity to the food item 16.

[046] FIG. 3 illustrates a partially unrolled bandolier 28 of vertically arranged eating utensil packets 30. Each eating utensil packet 30 includes an individual eating utensil 32 and each packet 30 is separable. The process for  
25 producing a bandolier 28 of individual, separable items is disclosed in US Patent 5,752,365 issued to Johnson et al. on May 19, 1998, which is herein incorporated by reference in its entirety. As illustrated, the rolled bandolier 28 in this



5           embodiment is circular and is accommodated within the cavity of the dispenser 12 for this embodiment.

[047]           In both FIGS. 2 and 3, the illustrated bandolier 28 and resulting eating utensil packets 30 are vertically oriented. That is, the eating utensils 32 are arranged side to side. FIGS. 4 and 5 illustrates a horizontal bandolier 40, which is  
10           substantially identical to bandolier 28, except that the eating utensils 32 are arranged horizontally or rather, end to end. This arrangement may make it easier for a consumer to grab and separate an individual eating utensil packet 30. In addition, a perforation 42 between adjacent packets 30 can be configured around the curvature of the eating utensil 30. This curved perforation 42 is well suited to  
15           be engaged by a tab or separation member located on the dispenser 12 to assist in tearing or separating one eating utensil packet 30 from another.

[048]           In one embodiment, the dispenser 12 dispenses full size eating utensils, such as spoons, forks, sporks, knives, chop sticks, and straws. In one embodiment, the dispenser 12 dispenses reduced size eating utensils. In another  
20           embodiment, a dispenser 12 is full of seasoning/topping packets.

[049]           In one embodiment, the dispenser dispenses folded utensils. For example, the bandolier 28, 40 contains folded eating utensils, such as a spoons, forks or sporks. In one embodiment, the foldable eating utensil has a handle coupled to a head. The head is a bowl in the context of a spoon or spork, while  
25           the head is a set of tangs in the context of a fork.

[050]           The handle of the eating utensil is hinged via a hinge at approximately the longitudinal midpoint of the eating utensil. Thus, in its folded

5 configuration, the eating utensil's length is approximately half of its unfolded length.

[051] In order to keep the eating utensil secured in the closed position, a locking tab and locking notch may be provided on differing portions of the handle. When closed, the locking tab is received within the locking notch. The frictional engagement between the locking tab and the locking notch tends to  
10 retain the eating utensil in the closed position, until intentionally opened.

[052] The hinge on the handle of the eating utensil has a thin flexible member that allows the two parts of the handle to pivot with respect to one another. The handle has a hinge tab disposed on one side of the hinge, and a  
15 hinge slot disposed on the other side of the hinge. The hinge tab is receivable within the hinge slot and maintains the handle in the extended position when the eating utensil is to be used. The hinge tab and slot are arranged and configured so when the eating utensil, such as a spoon, fork or spork, is used, the pressure applied to the top of the head by food tends to force the inner surface of the hinge  
20 slot against the hinge tab. In other words, when the eating utensil is extended, the hinge assembly is configured in such a way that normal use of the eating utensil works to keep the eating utensil in the extended position. Beyond that, the frictional engagement of the hinge tab against the hinge slot serves to keep the eating utensil in the extended position. When fully extended, the eating utensil  
25 has a length that is sufficient to allow a consumer to comfortably and conveniently consume the food item for which the eating utensil was supplied.

5           **[053]**           In one embodiment, the eating utensil can be folded in half to  
reduce its size for distribution and this folded structure can be incorporated into a  
plastic satchel 30 for convenient and sanitary distribution. In another  
embodiment, the plastic satchel 30 will contain a full size, non-folding eating  
utensil. In another embodiment, the plastic satchel 30 will contain a reduced size,  
10 non-folding eating utensil. Regardless of whether the eating utensil is foldable or  
non-foldable or whether it is full size or reduced size, each individual eating  
utensil is contained within a plastic satchel 30 and becomes part of a plurality of  
satchels 30 connected together as a bandolier 28 for loading into a dispenser 12.  
The dispenser 12 can be conveniently and unobtrusively mounted next to a food  
15 item display so the eating utensils are readily available to any patron desiring to  
acquire and consume the food item. Such a display can be placed proximate a  
point of sale to further convenience the consumer.

**[054]**           Embodiment of the present invention enable stores to provide a  
system that allows customers to try free samples of product prior to purchase  
20 without having to employ a person to distribute the free samples. As such,  
manufactures and retailers have may use the present system to provide free  
samples of food products that require utensils and/or seasoning/toppings for  
customers to try before buying.

**[055]**           Although the present invention has been described with reference  
25 to preferred embodiments, persons skilled in the art will recognize that changes  
may be made in form and detail without departing from the spirit and scope of the  
invention.